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## **USING BLOGS TO SUPPORT INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DURING INTERNSHIP**

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This study sought to understand the use of web logs to facilitate information sharing, knowledge sharing, and emotional support for internship students. Fifty-three (53) students from the BScIM Programme (Bachelor of Science in Information Management) evaluated the use of blogs during their internship. The results reveal that students generally have positive perceptions on blogging as a tool to facilitate information management and social support. The blogs are also perceived to be useful in terms of self-reflection, communication, and learning problem-solving skills. On the other hand, this study shows that the supervisor-students communication via blog comments needs to be improved. Finally, the blogging platform does not seem to have an impact on the students' perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of blogs.

### **1. Introduction**

Blogs have existed since the 1990s, but their application to educational settings is a relatively recent phenomenon (Tan, 2006). The term "blog" is an abbreviated form of "web log" which is a web-based journal presented in reverse chronological order that consists of a person's thoughts and ideas posted on the web for many viewers (Flatley, 2005). It is a database containing text entries and other forms of content, including pictures and sound files which can be created, edited and published to the Web in a flexible manner. Blogs have been effectively administered in higher and lower educational settings and also in distance learning settings (Gleaves, Walker & Grey, 2007; Downes, 2004; Churchill, 2009; Buffington, 2007). The application of blogs to internships, however, still remains to be explored.

The main purpose of an internship is to facilitate the application of theoretical concepts learned in classroom settings among students. A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the use of IT in internships (Doering, Hughes & Huffman, 2003; Graf & Stebnicki, 2002; Nasiopoulos & Ward, 2002), but so far only very few have touched on the use of blogs. The particular focus of this paper is the examination of the applicability of blogs as means for information sharing, knowledge sharing and social support during internship.

This study examines the blogging behaviors of BScIM (Bachelor of Information Management) students from The University of Hong Kong who were placed in various geographical locations in Hong Kong and other foreign countries during their internship. The geographical dispersion is seen as an obstacle for students in terms of receiving social support or engaging in information sharing behavior. Blogging provides a synchronous communication tool, and its applicability in the internship setting may worth testing. A more effective means of communication may facilitate learning by allowing students to share their thoughts, concerns, and feelings about their internship experiences.

## 2. Literature Review

*Internships:* Internships have long been recognized as an important method to prepare students for professional careers. Hands-on experience, informal apprenticeships with active professionals, and exploration of learning through other institutions (e.g. business, community associations) are fundamental ways of refining students' skills and helping them attain new insights on their professions (Weinberg, 1986). Since internships are effective transitory phases towards professional development, a significant body of literature has focused on the theories of design and experience in its implementation (Lloyd & Bristol, 2006; Ovens, 2004; McMahon & Quinn, 1995). Murray-Harvey (2001) has investigated sources of student support from teachers during a training program and the findings revealed that students placed a high value on emotional support from teachers, as well as collaboration and feedback from the associate teachers. In many cases, it is difficult to provide support on a face-to-face basis due to time constraints and geographical dispersion. Some studies have looked into the use of information technology (IT) and its potential applications for providing support during students' internship. These studies have examined web-based asynchronous discussions (Doering et al., 2003), email communications (Graf & Stebnicki, 2002), and the use of video-conferencing (Nasiopoulos & Ward, 2002).

*Blogging in Education:* Blogs have been considered to be more efficient than traditional pedagogical tools as they are portable, have automatic time and date stamps, can avoid misinformation due to time lag, and are economical if one has access to a computer and internet connection (Gleaves et al., 2006). The use of blogs as pedagogical tools have been documented with parents of first grade students (Clyde, 2005), with high school students (Downes, 2004), among librarians, in higher education settings (Churchill, 2009; Buffington, 2007; Franklin & van Harmelen, 2007), and in foreign language classrooms (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005).

Blogging is shown to be able to facilitate collaborative learning in terms of social interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1996, as cited in Curtis & Lawson, 2001), which allows students to share knowledge resources, feedback, and social support. Blogs may also function as tools of social interaction, encouraging communication and subsequent exploration by students through the mechanisms of comments and critiques. A few studies have found that the most effective aspects of maintaining a blog for students is reading others' blogs, and commenting on one's own blog (Churchill, 2009; Ellison & Wu, 2008). Blogging has further been shown as an efficient tool for distance learning and hybrid courses as it serves as a good alternative to face-to-face interactions, provides records of previous discussions, and goes beyond the time and place constraints of the classrooms (Buffington, 2007; Glogoff, 2005; Ellison & Wu, 2008).

Ellison & Wu (2008) proposed that blogging encourages critical and analytical thinking as it allows students to develop wider perspectives by interacting with their peers and even with a wider audience of the World Wide Web. Some findings revealed that peer feedback does not only encourage learning among students but also lead them to engage in a higher level of understanding (Ertmer et al., 2007). Blogs, being open systems, also offer access to other applications in the external environment such as software that are video-based [e.g., YouTube], picture-based [e.g., Flickr], and bookmark-based [e.g., Del.icio.us] (Hyung, 2008).

A number of studies have found blogs to be efficient reflective tools (Churchill, 2009; Hsu, 2007; Lin, Hmelo, Kinzer & Secules, 1999, as cited in Tan, 2006; Stiler & Philleo, 2003). Blog entries enhanced reflection among students when they are more analytical than descriptive (Stiler & Philleo, 2003). Furthermore, one of these studies has demonstrated that blogs can provide different perspectives from the members of the community and encourage better individual reflection (Lin et al., 1999, as cited in Tan, 2006). Reflection in the form of guided discovery has also been associated with blogging wherein students learned through discussion, exploration, and discovery (Glogoff, 2005). Blogs have also been shown to be good motivational tools which encourage students to engage in interactive discussions (Flatley, 2005; Downes, 2004). This phenomenon has been explained in terms of the activity theory such that people use blogs as objects to fulfill their needs and desires to communicate with their social networks (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht & Swartz, 2004, as cited in Hsu, 2007).

*Blogging in Internships:* There has been very little literature written on internship blogging. England, Fatzinger-McShane, Scarpero & Stapley (2008) have conducted a brief study on dietetic students' internship in relation to blogging. It was mentioned that blogging has helped those internship students by allowing reflection on experiences, and acquisition of knowledge and skills of particular work fields, which eventually helped them to be more successful in finding a job. Future interns can also get an idea of what is expected from them in an internship and future employers can know the internship students more through their blogs. It was also reported the dietetic internship students were free of worries for blogging, since it is free, not time-consuming, and user-friendly even to those without much website maintenance knowledge.

*Learning theory:* Based on the framework for knowledge work analysis (Figure 1), effective conversations and collaborations among workers are based on the combination of three dimensions: individual, communities, and ideas (Efimova, 2004). Using this framework, the blogging platform serves as the community where relations among internship students are established. It also provides a suitable mechanism for the exposure and awareness of ideas. These may include the information, knowledge, and experiences gained from different work fields. Effective knowledge sharing is facilitated by combining each individual's effort of active sharing.

Blogs have been found to be effective in organizing information, articulating, developing, and sharing ideas (Mortensen & Walker, 2002). Reading other students' blogs about internship experiences may enable students to come across new ideas for reference or further development. Blogs can even be used to capture ideas from the web and allow students to write about thoughts and keep these records for future reference. Developing ideas through blogging may be done individually or through interactions with others through commenting. Moreover, blogs can also act as tools for developing community relationships and conversational learning (Fiedler, 2003, as cited in Efimova,

2004). Essentially, individuals are able to establish and maintain a personal network, and organize the information exchanged through blogging. Ferdig and Trammel (2004) suggested that effective information and knowledge sharing could also be afforded by asynchronous discussion forums, but blogs provide an environment that is relatively more advanced. They further argued that unlike a discussion forum that is shared by many, a blog gives students full ownership over their online content which may not fit within a hierarchical or topic-based discussion forum.

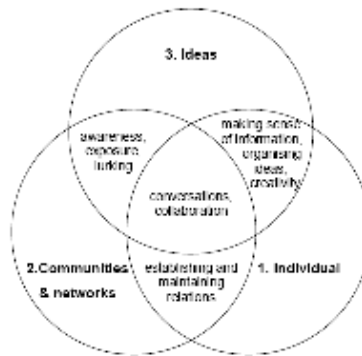


Figure 1. The framework for knowledge work analysis (Efimova, 2004).

*Literature Gap:* Previous literature has touched on the use of blogs as learning tools in education and business environments, while some studies have looked into the proposition of blogging in internship environments (England et al., 2008). However, these studies have mainly focused on blogs as self-reflection and marketing tools. Few known studies so far have investigated the potential of blogging in internship with a focus on information and knowledge sharing, as well as social support. This study investigates the blogging behavior of BScIM students from three different years of study during their internships in Hong Kong or overseas. The students were asked to engage in blogging as a platform for their reflections during their internship program.

### 3. Research methods

This study aimed to determine the students' blogging behaviors, and their perceptions of blogging in terms of facilitating information and knowledge exchange. We further investigated whether blogging functions as a social support mechanism among interns. The following was the fundamental guiding question of the study: *Does blogging help facilitate students' learning and communication during their internship?*

Building on this fundamental question and the literature gap discussed earlier, the following research questions were established:

1. Is blogging useful as a communication tool for interns who are separated by geographical distance?
2. Is blogging effective as a tool for interns to share information and knowledge, and for emotional support?

3. Is there a difference in the perceptions on blogging effectiveness between frequent and less frequent bloggers?
4. Is blogging effective as a tool for interns to carry out self-reflection?
5. Is there a difference in the perceptions on blogging among students who used different blogging platforms?

*Participants.* There are 53 undergraduate students from the Bachelor of Information Management (BScIM) participating in this study. They are grouped into three cohorts based on their years of enrolment from 2006 to 2008. They all took part in an internship programme lasting for one to three months in various organizations. The following is the breakdown of research participants in this study: 16 out of 19 interns in 2006, 16 out of 21 interns in 2007, and all the 21 interns in 2008. For each year, approximately 80% of the students undertook their internship in local organizations while the remaining 20% did their internship in Mainland China or overseas organizations.

*Data Collection.* The three cohorts of interns were asked to create blogs for sharing their experiences and posting reflections during internships. The three intakes of students had different blogging environments. The first cohort used a commercial blogging system: either Xanga (<http://hk.xanga.com>) or Blogger (<https://www.blogger.com>). The commercial blogging systems mainly provided blogging services with communication tools and search functions as complements. The second cohort used an open source content management system named Drupal, which is a free software package that allows an individual or a community of users to publish, manage, and organize a wide variety of content on a website. Similar to the first cohort, the third cohort also used a commercial blogging system called YouBlog (<http://www.youblog.cc>). Part of the internship requirements was the submission of self-reflections. The three groups of students were asked to write their self-reflections and post these as blogs every one or two day(s), starting from the first week of their internship to the end of it. Students were advised to share what they have learnt and useful resources with other classmates.

In the fall of 2008, the students in the three cohorts were invited to participate in a telephone interview, through which questions on their blogging experience were asked. The interview consisted of close-ended questions with response choices that used interval rating scales. Blogging behaviours were examined in terms of frequency on a weekly basis, while perceptions on the effectiveness of blogs for learning and support were examined through the use of a 4-point Likert scale. The Likert scale utilized the score of 1 for “Strongly disagree”, 2 for “Disagree”, 3 for “Agree”, and 4 for “Strongly disagree”. Reasons to support their response choices were probed through the use of open-ended questions. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ consent and transcribed for data processing.

*Data analysis.* The numerical data obtained in the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS (version 16.0). Interquartile range was calculated for the blogging frequency, and scores below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile were classified as infrequent users, while scores above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile were classified as frequent users. Responses on the Likert scales were summarized using descriptive statistics, and mean scores that were higher than 2.5 were interpreted as edging towards the positive, while mean scores that were lower than 2.5 were edging towards the negative feedback. Ratings on the effectiveness of blogs in supporting internships were compared between the two frequency groups using independent samples t-tests. The ratings among the three cohorts were also compared

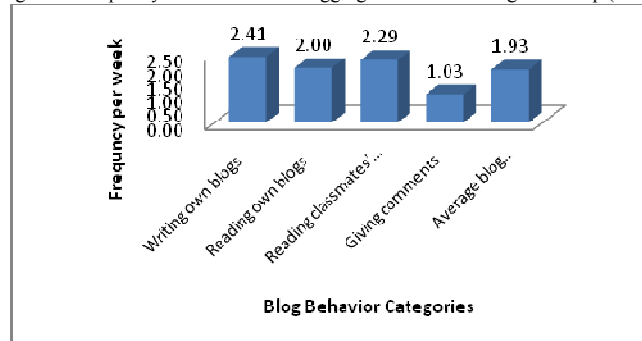
using one-way ANOVA. Statistical significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ . The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions were sorted and analyzed using NVivo version 7.0.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The results from the survey are generally positive, indicating that blogs are perceived as effective in facilitating their learning and communication during internships. In particular, students found blogs to be the most useful channel for self-reflections and sharing information. When comparing frequent and less frequent users' perceptions on blogging, the frequent users gave significantly higher ratings for blogs as enhancing information sharing and emotional support among interns. Moreover, no significant differences are found among the three cohorts of students. This section presents a general overview of students' blogging behaviours and their perceptions on blogging, followed by an in-depth analysis of each research question proposed.

*Blogging frequency.* Users' blogging frequency is described by the following blogging behaviours: writing their own blogs, reading their own blogs, reading others' blogs, and giving comments. These are measured in terms of frequency per week. An average blogging frequency is identified by using the mean of the frequencies of the 4 blogging behaviours. The most frequent behaviours are writing one's own blogs (mean =  $2.41 \pm 1.8$ ), and reading classmates' blogs (mean =  $2.0 \pm 1.8$ ). Figure 2 illustrates these findings.

Figure 2. Frequency of the students' blogging behaviours during internship (n=53).



*Students' general perceptions on blogging.* Most of the students' average ratings on blogging cluster around 2.5 to 3.0 (1 being 'strongly disagree' and 4 being 'strongly agree'). This suggests that blogging is perceived to be effective in supporting students in various aspects of their internships. In particular, students gave the highest ratings on blogs as useful tools for self-reflection (mean =  $3.2 \pm 0.65$ ), which indicates a positive effect of using blogs to facilitate students' learning process during internships.

In contrast to the preceding findings, students gave unfavourable ratings for the helpfulness of comments on their blogs, including those from their classmates and supervisors (mean =  $2.1 \pm 0.99$  and mean =  $0.6 \pm 1.09$ ) respectively. These findings are

summarized in Table 1. Probing inquiry reveals that students perceived the comments from their peers as shallow and not useful (14 out of 53 participants), while a few of them remarked that suggestions from one work field may not be applicable to another (5 out of 53).

Table 1. Overview of students' ratings on the usefulness of blogs for learning and communication (n = 53).

Survey questions	Overall ratings: Mean <sup>1</sup>	Standard Deviations
▪ Blogging is useful for communication among classmates	3.0	0.50
▪ Blogging is useful for self-reflection	3.2	0.65
▪ A blog is suitable for recording self-reflections	3.0	0.65
▪ A blog is a suitable platform to learn from other students' problem solving experience	2.5	0.82
▪ Classmates' comments on blogs are helpful	2.1	0.99
▪ Supervisors' comments on blogs are helpful	0.6	1.09

Note: <sup>1</sup>Using the 4-point Likert scale as discussed in the methodology section.

Students held generally negative views on the usefulness of their supervisors' blog comments mainly because they were either infrequent or absent (41 out of 53). The majority (89%) of the students reported that they received blog comments from their supervisors once per month or less. Student C3-S11 (Cohort 3-Student 11) gave a typical response of the interns regarding supervisors' comments "He (my supervisor) has never given me any feedback or comments via the blog." In another interview, Student C3-S3 noted that, "my supervisor had never visited my blog." For a few students who received comments from their supervisors, they regarded the comments as helpful advice for problem solving and academic work (9 out of 53). As some studies suggest that students have to learn through self-exploration and directive learning with their supervisor's feedback (Glogoff, 2005), it appears that there is a need to improve the regularity of supervisors' feedback in order to make learning more effective. The existence of supervisors' comments does not only serve as guidance for students, but also as an indicator that they consider blogging as an important communication tool. This may potentially encourage students to blog more frequently. Table 2 summarizes the information obtained through the open-ended questions.

*Effectiveness of blogging.* The students reported positive feedback on whether blogging facilitated information sharing, knowledge sharing, and provision of emotional support among the students. Table 3 summarizes the overall responses of the students, as well as the grouped responses according to blogging frequency. No significant differences were noted between the frequent and infrequent users.

General findings indicate that students found blogs to be useful for self-reflection and communication. Students also reported that blogs facilitate information sharing, knowledge sharing, and emotional support among students. The majority of them recommended adopting blogs for next year's internship (78% strongly agreed and 14% agreed) which may suggest a positive regard for the use of blogs in supporting students' internships.

Table 2. Students' opinions on the usefulness of classmates' and supervisors' comments.

	Positive Comments	Negative Comments
Getting useful comments from classmates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Comments allow difficulties to be shared; solutions and advice are obtained (9)</li> <li>■ Comments provide encouragement (9)</li> <li>■ Comments provide information on how the others are doing and their work areas (6)</li> <li>■ Comments provide a reflection of work situations and job scope (4)</li> <li>■ Different perspectives and viewpoints are discussed which helps problem solving (2)</li> <li>■ Promotes resolution of disagreements and sharing of ideas (2)</li> <li>■ Stimulate thinking (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Comments are shallow and useless (14)</li> <li>■ Comments are seldom (if not never) received (12)</li> <li>■ Comments regarding other work fields are not applicable (5)</li> </ul>
Getting useful comments from supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Comments provide professional and academic advices that helps problem solving (9)</li> <li>■ Comments are indicators that supervisors keep track of students' progress (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Comments from supervisors via blogging were seldom (if not never) received (41)</li> </ul>

Note: Students were asked to comment on the usefulness of comments from other internship students and supervisors.

Table 3. Students' ratings on the effectiveness of blogging (n=53).

Variables measuring the effectiveness of blogging	Overall ratings Mean <sup>1</sup> (SD)	Frequent users Mean (SD)	Infrequent users Mean (SD)	Sig. (t-test)
▪ Blogging facilitated knowledge sharing	2.8 (0.62)	2.93 (0.48)	2.6 (0.84)	0.153
▪ Blogging facilitated information sharing	3.1 (0.53)	3.29 (0.47)	3.0 (0.56)	0.279
▪ Blogging facilitated mutual emotional support	2.8 (0.70)	3.0 (.056)	2.64 (0.50)	0.084

Note: <sup>1</sup> Using the 4-point Likert scale as discussed in the methodology section.

*Research question 1: Is blogging useful as a communication tool for interns who are separated by geographical distance?*

The quantitative research findings presented in Table 1 support the proposition that blogs facilitate students' online interactions given a situation where the students are in different geographic areas of work. Compared to traditional means of communication, blogs are considered desirable tools for interns to make their thoughts, feelings and experience accessible to a wider audience (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Student C1-S10



suggested the benefits of communicating through blogs: (1) to increase the transparency of work because the BScIM course requires real-life sharing of experiences where different approaches have to be learnt; (2) to allow interns working overseas to communicate with each other as it provides a viable alternative to face-to-face interactions. Student C2-S8 worked overseas and thought that a blog is useful for communication as phone calls are seldom made to classmates who are working in Hong Kong. Another student (C1-S6) described the blog as a centralized platform for communication. Since the supervisor of C1-S6 had a blog containing the links of all their classmates' blogs, a connection was established despite the physical distance at work. On the other hand, students who did not think that blogs were very suitable communication tools reasoned that classmates or supervisors preferred using emails or direct conversation to communicate instead of blogs. Student C1-S3 clarified this by saying that blogs might be more useful for students working abroad. However, for classmates who worked in Hong Kong, they preferred face-to-face interactions.

*Research question 2: Is blogging effective as a tool for interns to share information and knowledge, and for emotional support?*

The perceived effectiveness of blogging is defined in terms of facilitation of knowledge sharing, information sharing and emotional support among interns. Generally, the students gave ratings that were on the positive side of the scale for all 3 dimensions. The students appear to acknowledge the effectiveness of blogging in facilitating information management and mutual support. This finding is consistent with Buffington's findings which suggest that blogs are good for supplementing face-to-face interactions (2007).

Table 4 shows that more students agree with the benefit of blogging in facilitating information and knowledge sharing. The main benefits of blogging for information sharing by most students include free mutual reading which allows them to know what the others are doing, to obtain information regarding other job fields, and to easily access research-related information. One example of students who share information on blogs is extracted below:

"The seminar will be held again on 23 August, if you are interested, go to the Census and Statistics Department's website for more details: [http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/statistical\\_literacy/course\\_and\\_seminars/scientific\\_sample\\_survey/index\\_tc.jsp](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/statistical_literacy/course_and_seminars/scientific_sample_survey/index_tc.jsp)"

This example illustrates that through accessing blogs of others with similar interests, bloggers can also get other information that may serve as useful resources (Efimova, 2004). Moreover, blogs are found to be able to enhance emotional support among students in various ways. Student C1-S6 reported that his classmates did not only write about what they had learnt, but also about their relationships with colleagues and supervisors so that insights were gained on dealing with interpersonal relationships in a positive way. Some students used blogs to vent their frustrations at work. For instance, student C1-S4 complained about not getting any interesting tasks at work while other students complained about the heavy workload or huge pressure they had during their internships.

The primary negative response concerns the superficiality and routine of most blog entries. It has been shown the blogging encourages ongoing and thoughtful reflection by

making thinking visible and available for critique and comment by others (Luehmann, 2008). However, the findings of this study appear to indicate that some students may not have achieved such kind of reflection through their blogging. The students' blogs represent their self-reflections which make up an academic requirement for their internship. This may have affected the results in different ways. As seen in the negative feedback on the blog entries, the required nature of the blogs may have resulted in superficial and routine entries which were written primarily to fulfill a requirement. On the other hand, the required nature may possibly push some students to put extra effort on writing their blogs to improve their academic position. In any case, these aspects need further examination which are beyond the scope of this report. Future inquiries may look into one's intrinsic motivations to blog as opposed to blogging in relation to the required reflection. This may reveal further insights on optimizing the educational impact of blogging. At this point, the findings essentially imply that there is a need to increase the students' awareness of blogs' potential usefulness during an internship.

Table 4. Students' opinions on blog as a suitable tool to facilitate information and knowledge sharing.

	Positive feedback	Negative feedback
A suitable tool to facilitate information and knowledge sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provides knowledge on what others are doing (13)</li> <li>■ Provides information on other work fields (8)</li> <li>■ Enables sharing of information on research, photos, videos (8)</li> <li>■ Provides free mutual reading (9)</li> <li>■ Allows sharing of experiences (5)</li> <li>■ Provides access to information everywhere at anytime (4)</li> <li>■ Serves as a source for problem-solving mechanisms (3)</li> <li>■ Provides opportunities to learn from others' experience and analysis (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Most blog entries are unimportant and routine (6)</li> <li>■ Most entries are personal and are not useful comments (4)</li> <li>■ Students just write little in order to complete the assignment (4)</li> <li>■ Face-to-face communication is necessary (2)</li> </ul>

Note: Students were asked to comment on the effectiveness of information and knowledge sharing by blogging.

*Research question 3: Is there a difference in the perceptions on the effectiveness of blogging between frequent and less frequent bloggers?*

Frequent and infrequent bloggers were identified using the interquartile range of the blogging frequency as a reference point. Infrequent users are those who belong to the group lower than the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile while the frequent users belong to the group higher than the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile. A descriptive look at the data indicates that frequent users have more positive ratings than the infrequent users. However, using t-tests to compare the mean scores ( $p < 0.05$ ), there were no significant differences in the perceptions by the two groups concerning the effectiveness of blogging.

Though the data are not statistically significant, the trend of the ratings may still indicate that the more frequent the students use blogs, the more they become familiar with the features and functions and perceive blogging more positively. The ratings given by frequent users for blogs as enhancers of emotional support appear to be consistent with the framework by Efimova (2004) which posits that frequent users are more likely to

form a virtual community with other bloggers, resulting in certain social effects through their interactions. Eventually, blogs become a stable infrastructure for social support when students frequently write blogs and comment on others' blogs.

*Research question 4: Is blogging effective as a tool for interns to carry out self-reflection?*

Among the six dimensions measuring the perceived usefulness of blogs, participants gave the highest ratings for the use of blogs for self-reflection. This finding is consistent with several similar studies on blogs which suggest that blogging is effective for self-reflection due to its easy retrieval of previous information (Flatley, 2005), automatic archiving of information and more effective monitoring of one's progress (Lin et al., 1999, as cited in Tan, 2006). Students can always retrieve their reflections from their blogs by typing the date of entry. More importantly, this reflection process can contribute to effective learning as it enables students to better understand what they have learnt and how these learnt skills can be applied in the future (Tan, 2006). Table 5 shows a considerable number of students agrees that using blogs is effective for self-reflection. The reasons for regarding blogs as an effective tool for reflections are manifold. The most common reason is that blogs are useful reminders to prevent students from missing data for their projects. It may also be noted that it provides a systematic record of what students have done at work, and it is convenient to use. On the contrary, the major reason for students' negative perceptions of blogs' efficiency is the concern over privacy. Student C1-S7 commented on this by saying that "the blog is a platform that anyone can access, which information can be easily traced by date of entry and type of content. Outsiders would then be able to see information that I want to keep private."

Table 5. Students' opinions on using blogs to keep self-reflections.

	Positive comments	Negative comments
A suitable platform to keep reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Blogs serve as reminders for projects (14)</li> <li>■ Record and reflect things systematically (12)</li> <li>■ Blogs are convenient to do (7)</li> <li>■ Entries are easy to trace (5)</li> <li>■ Readily usable for sharing (5)</li> <li>■ Easy to access (4)</li> <li>■ Suggestions from classmates and supervisors are received (3)</li> <li>■ Allow expression of feelings (2)</li> <li>■ Blogs are centralized platforms (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Privacy concerns (4)</li> <li>■ Concerns about grades and authenticity of content (3)</li> <li>■ The mandatory use of computers is found to be problematic (2)</li> <li>■ There are better alternatives, e.g., Facebook (2)</li> </ul>

Note: Students were asked to comment on the blog's suitability to keep reflections.

*Research question 5: Is there a difference in the perceptions on blogging among students who used different blogging platforms?*

As the data is collected across three years from three cohorts of students, it is interesting to observe whether there are differences among the three cohorts' perceptions regarding blogging. Our results show that the three groups of students do not have significant differences on their ratings regarding blogging (all  $p > .05$ , see Table 6). No particular trend has been found on students' ratings for blogs over the years. As

mentioned earlier, each cohort of students used a different blogging system, either of commercial or open-source management type. It appears that their perceptions on the usefulness of blogging are consistent regardless of the platform that was used. A consistent negative feedback was also given for the usefulness of classmates' and supervisors' comments. These findings imply that the type of blogging platform may not have a significant effect on blogging impact during the internship programme. Instead, more attention should be paid to the quantity and quality of comments from classmates and supervisors in the future, which would improve the perceptions on blogging among students.

Table 6. Comparing the 3 cohorts' ratings on the usefulness of blogs as a platform for learning (n=53).

Survey questions	Cohort 1 Mean <sup>1</sup> (SD)	Cohort 2 Mean (SD)	Cohort 3 Mean (SD)	Sig. ANOVA
	n=16	n=16	n=21	
▪ Blogging is useful for self-reflection	3.25 (0.45)	3.19 (0.54)	3.05 (0.50)	0.45
▪ Blog is suitable for keeping self-reflections	2.81 (0.40)	3.25 (0.58)	3.05 (0.81)	0.16
▪ Blog is a suitable platform to learn from other's problem solving experience	2.5 (0.97)	2.5 (0.82)	2.57 (0.75)	0.73
▪ Blogging is useful for communication among classmates	2.94 (0.93)	3.06 (0.57)	3.0 (0.71)	0.11
▪ Classmates' comments on blogs are helpful	2.06 (1.48)	1.94 (1.12)	2.24 (0.89)	0.96
▪ Supervisors' comments on blogs are helpful	1.19 (1.52)	0.88 (1.36)	0.33 (0.80)	0.89

Note: <sup>1</sup> Using the 4-point Likert scale as discussed in the methodology section.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, across three cohorts, students generally found blogging as a useful tool during their internships. In particular, they found it useful for self-reflection, learning from others' problems and communication, especially for students who have to work overseas. The students also perceived the blogs to be effective in facilitating information sharing, knowledge sharing, and emotional support. No significant differences were observed between frequent and infrequent users.

Unfavourable ratings for the comments of classmates and supervisors were consistently given across three cohorts over three years. Such feedback was mainly due to inadequacy of those coming from the supervisors and shallowness of those coming from classmates. The findings, being consistent regardless of the blogging platform used, implies that the human factor is a more relevant consideration in the system, with reference to the comments of supervisors and classmates. For further implementation of blogging for internship, a stronger background briefing is recommended for supervisors and students alike, in order to allow better familiarization with the blogging system. Supervisors should also be encouraged to participate in the blogs more actively, as more active supervisors would potentially result in improved usefulness of blogs in internship.

## 6. Limitations and further studies

Since students' blogging in this study represented the required reflections during their internship, they may have felt the need to blog in order to merely fulfill an academic requirement. This could have affected the quality of comments and the frequency of

blogging. Further studies may examine the use of blogging outside the academic requirements. Furthermore, as this study is conducted among BScIM students who share a particular professional interest and education background, it has limited generalizability on how blogs can effectively support students' internships.

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